

MP calls for Porter explanation on the persecution of K and Collaery

By *Bernard Keane*, political editor, Crikey.com. 26 November 2020

A Labor MP with close links to Timor-Leste has called on Christian Porter to explain himself over the prosecution of Witness K and Bernard Collaery and suggests 'reputational protection' is behind the secrecy of the trial.



Bernard Collaery (left) and Labor MP Luke Gosling (right) (Images: AAP)

Labor MP Luke Gosling has called on Attorney-General Christian Porter to explain why his prosecution of Witness K and Bernard Collaery is in the public interest, and says the government has missed an opportunity to put its poor treatment of Timor-Leste in the past.

The Northern Territory MP has extensive links with the country after serving there while in the ADF and spending several years there running an NGO.

Earlier in the year, Gosling [criticised](#) Porter's attempt to prosecute K and Collaery in a secret trial, but now says Porter must make up for his failure to explain why he is pursuing the two men.

"Porter is yet to provide a detailed explanation for his decision to prosecute Witness K and Collaery, to spell out why this action is in the public interest," Gosling told Crikey. "If the government really cares about transparency and accountability, there's a very easy place to start: just be upfront with Australians. They can handle it. So can our relationship with Timor Leste. The bonds between ordinary Australians and Timorese have never wavered."

"In choosing to prosecute them, Porter decided in six months to do what his predecessor, George Brandis, chose not to do in his entire term. But the reasons for prosecuting these two Australians the real reasons are crucial details this government is being uncharacteristically silent about."

Gosling viewed the settlement of the maritime border dispute between Australia and Timor-Leste in 2018 after the Timorese initiated a case against Australia at the International Court of Justice as a chance to reset relations. It's an opportunity the government missed, he says.

"We had an opportunity to move on from the past after settling the maritime issue. It was a difficult period we could have put it to bed. But the cover-up of previous incidents continues."

Gosling has worked in Timor-Leste at the highest and most grassroots levels. After military service there, he produced the film *A Debt of Honour* detailing the experience of Australian soldiers in the INTERFET Timor-Leste mission and that of Australian commandoes operating under Japanese occupation there during WWII. During that time he met Collaery and popular leader Xanana Gusmao before returning as an ADF defence advisor to the new country's military in 2005.

In between, he built schools, provided water to remote villages and helped deliver maternal health services though, he says, he doesn't want to overstate his work. He continues to try to help the country via seasonal worker programs, defence cooperation and his links with the Darwin Timorese diaspora. The K/Collaery case, he says, "has stirred up a lot of hurt for many Timorese and Australians alike".

[Bernard Keane](#)

Politics editor [@BernardKeane](#)

Bernard Keane is *Crikey's* political editor. Before that he was *Crikey's* Canberra press gallery correspondent, covering politics, national security and economics.